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FOR NEA/ARP AMACDONALD AND INR JYAPHE

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [YM](#)
SUBJECT: ALL TALK: SALEH'S "NATIONAL DIALOGUE" HOLDS LITTLE
HOPE FOR PROGRESS

REF: A. 09 SANAA 1687
[1](#)B. 09 SANAA 335

Classified By: Ambassador Stephen Seche for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. With war raging in Sa'ada, widespread secessionist sentiment in the southern governorates, extremism on the rise and an economy in tatters, President Saleh and his Supreme Security Committee called for a National Dialogue, scheduled to begin in mid-January. Despite ROYG calls for participation from a wide swath of actors, the opposition Joint Meeting Parties (JMP)) the country's only legitimate political opposition) has said it will boycott the talks because of what it perceives as broken promises and a lack of seriousness on the government's behalf, in addition to focusing on its own, separate effort at hosting a National Dialogue. If the JMP boycotts the talks, which will also exclude groups that promote violence or work against Yemen's unity such as the Houthi rebels and members of the Southern Movement, the result will be yet another, one-sided effort that stops short of real dialogue, let alone produces realistic, innovative solutions to Yemen's many political and economic crises. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) President Saleh used a meeting of Yemen's Supreme Security Council to propose that a National Dialogue be held to address the country's major problems) the Sa'ada war, the Southern Movement, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and the economy. (Note: The opposition Joint Meeting Parties (JMP) is currently engaged in its own National Dialogue effort, which has not to date included the ruling General People's Congress (GPC) (Ref A). End Note.) It is unusual for such a political proposal to come out of the Security Council, typically focused on narrowly defined issues of defense and security such as military operations against the Houthi rebels in Sa'ada governorate. In a December 14 letter to Shoura Council Chairman Abdulaziz Abdulghani obtained by PolOff, Saleh proposed that the Shoura Council, Yemen's consultative legislative body, host the dialogue, to include representatives from the following groups: the Shoura Council, political parties, the 'ulama (religious scholars), Parliament, civil society organizations, local councils and the tribes. According to Deputy Prime Minister for Defense and Security and Minister of Local Administration Dr. Rashad al-Alimi, the regime plans to use the dialogue to discuss implementation of the February agreement between the GPC and JMP (Ref B). "This is not a substitute for, but an expansion of that process," Alimi told the Ambassador on December 16. Longtime presidential advisor Dr. Abdulkarim al-Eryani, tasked by President Saleh with mediating between the ruling and opposition parties, told the Ambassador in mid-December that he was trying to convince the JMP to participate in the ROYG initiative after a months-long standoff. (Note: Local media reported that President Saleh met with the JMP leadership on December 24 - the first official meeting between the ruling and opposition parties since August - but the conversation focused on the overall political situation

in the country and made little progress in preparing for the elections. End Note.)

13. (C) After months with little interaction between the ruling and opposition parties, and years of mistrust, the JMP has greeted the president's proposal with doubt and resistance. Al-Haq party chairman Hassan Zayd told PolOff on January 5 that the JMP leadership had officially decided to boycott Saleh's National Dialogue. "The main condition for any dialogue to succeed is the seriousness of both parties," Islah Secretary General Abdulwahab al-Ansi told the Ambassador on December 15. Ansi said he did not see this as a serious attempt by the ruling party, especially because it came out of the Security Council, a body used to addressing security crises rather than longstanding issues of policy. "We gambled when we signed the February agreement, and now we are in the current situation that we might have predicted." He restated the JMP's earlier demands to restart dialogue, such as releasing political prisoners, inviting all political forces (to include Houthis and southern secessionists) and halting harassment of the media. Southern Movement leader General Mohammed Saleh Tammah told PolOff on December 20 that the movement's members would "absolutely not" participate in the dialogue under any conditions. Former Minister of Foreign Affairs and longtime presidential advisor Mohammed Basenduah told the Ambassador that, instead of readying the political situation for dialogue, the ROYG had moved in the opposite direction, making it difficult for the opposition to justify participation. On December 20, the JMP called for a "serious dialogue to save Yemen," and, although it has yet to make an official decision, is leaning towards boycotting the talks, according to EmbOff contacts. The ROYG recognizes the need for opposition participation, but has struggled to

convince the JMP to take part. "The democratic process has two wheels, the ruling party and the opposition. We can't keep driving on one wheel," Alimi said. He asked for support from the U.S. and other donor countries to encourage the opposition to participate in the talks. (Note: The dialogue, originally slated to begin on December 26, was postponed at least two weeks to allow more time for the ROYG to convince the opposition to participate. It is now tentatively scheduled to begin on January 9. End Note.)

COMMENT

14. (C) Although the JMP has officially decided not to participate in the talks, last-minute backroom deals are not unusual in Yemeni politics, and a slim chance remains that the legitimate political opposition (the JMP) will join in Saleh's National Dialogue. If they do not, the cycle of one-sided "talks" and media messaging that dominated Yemeni politics in 2009 is certain to continue into 2010. Until the ruling party can successfully convince the JMP to participate in focused discussions on (1) electoral amendments followed by (2) political reforms, progress is unlikely. END COMMENT. SECHE